DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 527 CG 022 024

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TITLE International Student Depression during Cultural Adjustment: Two Counseling Approaches and Strategies.
PUB DATE 10 Nov 89
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Little Rock, AR, November 8-10, 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); College Students; Counseling Objectives; Counseling Services; *Counseling Theories; *Depression (Psychology); *Foreign Students; Higher Education; School Counseling

ABSTRACT

The growing number of international students and exchange scholars enrolled in American colleges and universities each year has called attention to the need to provide special mental health services to help international students adjust to the host culture and solve various mental health problems. According to Alderian therapy, people are basically social beings and all their behaviors are purposeful and goal-oriented. When international students come to the United States, almost all will experience the feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Working with clients with culturally induced depression, the counselor's encouragement is very important. Group work is highly recommended in the Alderian approach. Students are active participants in such group discussion. Using behavior counseling, the goal for the international student is to adapt to the host culture without adopting it and abandoning the home culture since they are planning to return to their home culture. Although the outcomes of counseling will vary among individuals, the general outcomes of counseling should be an increase in interaction with the host society and a decrease in anxiety and depression caused by cultural differences. When actually working with students, counseling strategies should be carefully chosen according to the needs and specific situation of that individual. (ABL)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENT DEPRESSION DURING CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: TWO COUNSELING APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

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PRESENTED AT
MID-SOUTH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS
NOVEMBER 10, 1989

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International Student Depression During Cultural Adjustment: Two Counseling Approaches and Strategies

Pheny Zhou Smith

The development of science and technology brings about changes almost day by day. The traditional characteristic of education, that each nation bears the responsibility for providing education for its own citizens, is no longer true. More and more countries realize the importance of internationalization of education in this contemporary world. Human beings are recognized as living in one big family in the world. All nations need to maintain peace and cooperation more than ever. Under such circumstances, education has become recognized as an activity with the purpose to develop and strengthen the consciousness of solidarity among people, to engage them in cooperation with one another (Kobayaski, 1986).

The international aspect of contemporary education has been manifested in increasing numbers of exchange scholars and students moving among different nations. Among them, the United States receives the largest number of international students and exchange scholars every year (Smith & Smith, 1988). Americans benefit from the presence of international students not only in the area of social interaction but also the enrichment of the learning environment and the establishment of long-term commercial, trade and diplomatic links (Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986; Smith, 1955).

The growing number of international students and exchange scholars enrolled in American colleges and universities each year has called attention to the need to provide special mental health services to help international students adjust to host culture and solve various mental problems (Smith & Smith, 1987). Oberg (1960) first introduced the term "culture shock" to describe the stress experienced by anyone moving to a new culture. Culture shock is characterized by such symptoms as fascination, anxiety, helplessness, depression, irritability, extreme loneliness and a longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment (Thomas, 1985; Church, 1982; Adler, 1975; Arensberg and Niehoff, 1964; Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Lundstedt, 1963; Foster, 1962; Oberg, 1960).

Hundreds of articles have dealt with adjustment problems international students encounter when they sojourn in a host culture; however, most of them stay at the surface of problem diagnosis and discussion. Few have tried to provide specific methods that can be used by counseling and psychotherapy professionals to help international students cope with their problems. In this paper, difficulties caused by cultural adjustment among international students are explained by two different counseling theories: Adlerian Therapy and Behavior Counseling. Specific counseling strategies and desired counseling goals are discussed according to each

theory. The purpose is to provide some concrete suggestions and strategies for postsecondary student personnnel workers who have contact with international students.

According to Adlerian therapy, people are basically social beings and all their behaviors are purposeful and goal-oriented. Humans are born in the most inferior (helpless) position of all animals. Humans constantly try to take control of their lives while they are growing up. Throughout life, humans constantly strive for competence, winning approval from others and finding a significant place in the group or society within which they live. Throughout life, the fundamental purpose of human behavior is to achieve a sense of belonging and a position of superiority. Many of the problems encountered are related to the fear of not being accepted by groups we value. Anxiety and depression may be the result of unfulfillment of a sense of belonging (Corey, 1986, p. 48).

When international students come to the United States, almost all will experience the feelings of loneliness and homesickness. They will find themselves in a very unpleasant situation. On one hand, the host society and culture are very different from their own. Everything is strange --the people, their ways and the things they value. On the other hand, the lack of close friendship and language difficulties make it difficult, if not impossible, to share these feelings with anyone. Strong feelings of lacking identity, inadequacy or inferiority arise from the perception of being disliked and expelled by the society where they are now living (Smith & Smith, 1987). The results of these negative feelings often are anxiety, depression and withdrawal from the host culture.

Working with clients experiencing such culturally induced depression, the counselor's encouragement is very important, even essential. The counselor's real attending--being genuine, empathic and having unconditional regard for the client--enables the client to experience, perhaps for the first time, someone in the host country who cares about her or him. The counselor's sensitivity to a client's nonverbal cues as well as verbalized and implied feelings help the client gain a sense of being understood. Working collaboratively with the client, the counselor communicates to the client such messages as, "I value you as a person. You are okay," and gives the client hope. The collaborative counseling relationship also makes the client a full and equal participant in the counseling process, which will help the client to accept herself or himself (Dinkmeyer, 1972). The counseling process focuses on providing information about American culture, teaching necessary social or coping skills and offering encouragement to depressed or disturbed clients. Counseling aims at helping clients to overcome feelings of depression and inferiority.

Many counseling strategies can be used in order to achieve the goals discussed above. Group work is highly recommended in the Adlerian approach. Students are active participants in such group discussion. Through discussion, students can be provided opportunities to practice

application of critical thinking and receive feedback on the results. Discussion provides a setting for the student to check the reality of self and personal views of the world. It helps the student to clarify personal attitudes and values and to achieve a greater understanding of the values and attitudes of other group members. Also, through interaction with group members, change in motivation and attitudes can be achieved. This process is more effective in shaping attitudes, ideas and appreciation than other intervention strategies. However, many international students, especially Asians, find group sharing of personal problems to be repugnant (Smith & Smith, 1989). Asian students, especially Chinese, may need more individual attention. Group work is, however, useful as a medium for training Asian students in communication skills and in building positive social attitudes and a sense of belonging. It is, in fact, a good approach for all international students when the emphasis is on providing information rather than interaction with personal problems.

The discussion group may include both international students and American students so it can provide an opportunity for both groups of people to understand each other and clarify misunderstandings caused by different cultural values. Such group work is also a very good culture learning opportunity for both international and American students. Through this process, the individuals could gain new experiential knowledge by coming to understand the inappropriateness of judging the nature of culture in terms of good or bad, right or wrong. These new perspectives and outlooks on the nature of culture will enable the individual to reconfirm her or his own identity in the face of new linguistic, perceptual, emotional and cultural learning. Through interaction with other international students, the individual could understand that the stress, depression and frustration caused by cultural adjustment are common feelings among international students. Also, during the group work period, new interpersonal relationships or friendships can be established among the international students and American students. All this should help to reduce the depression caused by cultural adjustment to a bearable degree as well as increasing interaction with host nationals.

Everyone was born into and socialized in some distinctive culture. Culture refers to a configuration of learned behaviors which are shared and transmitted in a society and by a particular group of people. Those behaviors connote a way of life in that particular society, enable the members in that society to survive, be human and behave properly in that specific culture. Human beings are socialized according to the normative behavior which is established in the culture in which they are living.

Behaviors are divergent from one culture to another. Living in the society within which we were born and socialized, we know what expectations the society has of us as well as the ones we have of others in the society. Behaviors and attitudes are predictable. Anthropological studies have established that people usually feel comfortable with predictable situations or environments.

When a person moves to a new society or culture, those skills and norms which enabled participation in the former culture are, to varying degrees, inadequate in the new situation. The individual encounters a problem--the task of adjusting to cultural values, role expectations and behavior patterns for which he or she was not socialized (Spradley & Phillips, 1972). Fear and depression may arise from the losing of all familiar reinforcers, signs and symbols of social intercourse. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) clearly described the resulting depression:

> "Initially the sojourners report feelings of elation and optimism associated with positive expectations regarding interaction with their hosts. As they actually become involved in the role relationships and encounter frustrations in trying to achieve certain goals when the proper means are unclear or unacceptable, they become confused and depressed and express negative attitudes regarding the host culture" (p. 34).

When working with culturally induced depression in international students, the therapeutic goal should be to help the student acclimate to the host culture. The accommodation to a new culture involves acquiring and improving social skills needed to perform in the new environment, learning new rules for interaction and reorganization of cognitive maps from a cultural dualism approach to a cultural pluralism approach in terms of dealing with cultural values. Throughout the counseling process, counselor should adopt an active, directive role--act as a teacher, director and expert in prescribing curative procedures, and helping the client to engage in them (Corey, 1986, p. 179). But the counseling relationship should be a mutual commitment between the client and counselor. The counselor should be aware of her or his own values and biases and avoid imposing personal values on the client. Furthermore, the goal is for the international student to adapt to the host culture without adopting it and abandoning the home culture. They are, after all, planning to return to their home culture and do not wish to give up their personal culture.

There are many ways to help international students to improve and acquire social skills needed to perform in the new environment. Among them modeling is used most often. In modeling, the client learns through observation and imitation. This technique can be used to help international students to learn language patterns, social skills, new rules for interaction and coping skills necessary for living in the host culture. Various forms of modeling can be adapted in the helping process. The counselor can serve as a model within the therapeutic session. By interacting with the counselor, the client can learn appropriate behavior, attitudes and social skills. Symbolic models such as films, videotapes and other recording devices can be used to help the international students understand American culture as well as improve their English.

The counselor also can help the international student to find or arrange for an American roommate. In such a situation learning will take place in every day living. The ideal roommate

will be an American student who is majoring in the foreign language spoken by the international student. Such an arrangement can help both international student and American student to learn from each other. Because the language difficulty is reduced, the learning of American culture and social skills will be easier and faster than under other circumstances.

Group work which was discussed under Adlerian therapy can be used here in order to help the international student gain new perspectives about the nature of culture and better understand American culture and values. Some community programs, such as 'student adoption,' are very useful for helping international students to understand American culture and improve social skills needed to function in American society.

Although the outcomes of counseling will vary among individuals, the general outcomes of counseling should be an increase in interaction with the host society and decrease in anxiety and depression caused by cultural differences. All discussions in this article are specifically related to the depression caused by culture differences among international students. They may not be applicable to depression caused by other reasons. The reader must keep this limitation in mind. Some specific helping strategies have been suggested in this article; however, counseling is a highly individualized intervention process. When actually working with individuals, counseling strategies should be carefully chosen according to the needs and specific situation of that individual.

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